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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' attitudes toward gifted students and students with learning problems integrated into their classrooms. A sample of 46 fourth and fifth grade teachers in a rural school district completed attitude questionnaires about all of their students and personal data forms about themselves. The teachers' attitudes toward their gifted, special education, and typical students were compared. Teachers were more rejecting toward special education students compared to typical and gifted students, but they also reported significantly higher levels of concern for their special education students. Teachers with inclusion programs reported more concern for their special education students than did teachers whose special education students were "pulled out" for service. The study concluded that, since teachers' general attitudes toward inclusion did not relate to teachers' specific attitudes toward actual students, teacher training should not necessarily focus on changing teachers' attitudes toward integration of identified groups of students. Tables detail the study's results. (Contains 63 references.) (Author/DB)

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Regular Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Their
Identified Gifted and Special Education Students

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Running Head: TEACHERS' ATTITUDE

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Abstract

The investigators explored teachers' attitudes toward the gifted students and special education students with learning handicaps integrated into their classrooms. A sample of 46 fourth and fifth grade teachers completed attitude questionnaires about all of their students and personal data forms about themselves. The teachers' attitudes toward their gifted, special education and non-identified students were compared. Teachers were more rejecting toward special education students compared to non identified students and gifted students, but they also reported significantly higher attitudes of concern for their special education students. Teachers with inclusion programs did report more concern for their special education students than teachers whose special education students were "pulled-out" for service. Since teachers' general attitudes toward inclusion did not relate to teachers' specific attitudes toward actual students, teacher training should not necessarily focus on changing teachers' attitudes toward integration of identified groups of students.

Regular Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Their Identified Gifted and Special Education Students

Researchers have identified teacher attitudes as a major concern in exploring teacher effects upon integrated or mainstreamed students with exceptional needs. Teachers' attitudes toward three populations were explored, students with disabilities (SD), non identified students (NS), and gifted students (GS). According to Hudson, Reisberg, and Wolf (1983), inclusion may be defeated if teachers do not hold positive attitudes toward this practice. Since integrating SD is now commonly implemented, research is needed to examine these effects. In this research paper, SD refers to students who are determined by the school district to have an identified learning handicap such as learning disabilities, behavior disorders, or educable mental retardation. Repeated findings have documented that regular teachers harbor negative attitudes toward students with handicaps integrated into regular classes (Blazovic, 1972; Childs, 1979; Horne, 1983; Houck, 1992; Lobosco & Newman, 1992; McClosky & Quay, 1987; O'Reilly & Duquette, 1988; Parish, Eads, Reese, & Piscitello 1977; Phillips, Allred, Brulle, & Shank, 1990; Roberts & Pratt, 1987; Schumm & Vaughn, 1992; Vacc & Kirst, 1977). A few recent studies have found evidence that teacher attitudes may be more positive toward integration of SD (Harvey, 1992; Thorkildsen & Lowry, 1991). These studies used vignettes or general questions rather than actual mainstreamed SD when investigating teachers' attitudes. There are problems with current research of teacher attitudes toward integrated or mainstreamed students (Jones, 1984; Wilczenski, 1992). The researchers assumed that teachers with negative attitudes toward mainstreaming would reject students with handicaps. Not only may this be a faulty assumption, but these general

questions do not explore teachers attitudes toward their real students with learning handicaps (Barnartt & Kabzems, 1992; Siegel, 1992).

The current special education debate over service delivery methods, pull-out or segregated programs versus full inclusion or integrated programs, has encouraged researchers to examine teacher attitudes toward these two delivery systems. Several studies have evidence that teachers prefer the traditional pull-out system (Lombardi, 1990; Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991) while other studies have demonstrated contrasting evidence that teachers prefer the newer full-inclusion methods (Marwell, 1990; Myers & Bounds, 1991; Walsh, 1991). It is still not known whether teachers have more positive attitudes toward students according to the type of delivery system.

The studies that have explored teacher attitudes toward gifted students and gifted programs also have mixed results. A few studies demonstrated that teachers harbored negative attitudes toward gifted students and gifted programs (Bransky, 1987; Patchett & Gauthier, 1991; Patteridge, 1989), but other studies' results demonstrated that teachers held positive attitudes toward gifted students and programs (Larsson, 1990; Lobosco & Newman, 1992; Phillips, et al., 1990).

An often cited study by Silberman (1971) examined teacher attitudes toward their regular education students. Four specific attitudes were identified by Silberman (1969) to investigate the teacher attitude-behavior relationship: attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection. Attachment was defined as a teacher's affectionate tie to a student, derived from the pleasure the student brings to the teacher's work. Concern refers to a teacher's sympathy and support for a student's academic and/or emotional problems. Indifference describes a teacher's lack of involvement with a student because he or she fails to excite or dismay the teacher. Rejection is when a teacher refuses to consider the student as a worthy recipient of the teacher's professional energies (Silberman, 1969).

Silberman conducted his study using attitude questions that focused on teachers' current students. The probes he used were as follows (Silberman, 1969):

1. Attachment: If you could keep one student for another year for the sheer joy of it, whom would you pick?

2. Indifference: If a parent dropped in unannounced for a conference, whose child would you be least prepared to talk about?

3. Concern: If you could devote all your attention to a child who concerned you a great deal, whom would you pick?

4. Rejection: If your class size was reduced by one child, whom would you be relieved to have removed?

The purpose of this research was to evaluate teachers' attitudes toward actual students with learning handicaps and gifted students integrated into their classrooms rather than their general attitudes toward integration of exceptional students. The difference between this research and previous studies is the use of questions that are not dichotomous and the teachers reported attitudes toward actual students rather than attitudes toward the broader topics of mainstreaming, disabilities gifted students.

Methods

The study assessed teachers' attitudes toward the SD, GS and their non handicapped students in their classrooms. The subjects, procedures, instruments, hypotheses and analyses are described in the following section. The surveys were piloted in previous research by the principal researcher (Siegel, 1992).

Subjects

Fourth, and fifth grade teachers (n=46) who taught at the elementary schools in one rural school district participated in the study. All the consenting teachers with integrated SD or GS in their classrooms were included in the study

(six teachers did not qualify); only nine of the available teachers declined to participate in the study.

Procedures

The teachers were told that this was a study of teachers' perceptions. They were not informed that their attitudes toward the mainstreamed SD and GS in their classrooms was the focus of the study. The teachers were asked to complete a Teacher Information Form and Teacher Attitude Surveys. This study was conducted in November. The forms took the teachers approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

Teacher Information Form. Teachers were asked about the factors that were determined to have a significant effect on teacher attitudes toward mainstreamed students. These included the teachers' special education training, general attitude toward mainstreaming, prior experience with mainstreamed SD and GS and prior success with mainstreamed SD and GS. The following are the direct questions from the Teacher Information Form. On the original there were several distracters about culturally diverse students, and limited English speaking students. There are no reliability or validity measures on these questions, but they were modeled after previous research questionnaires ("Measuring Teacher Attitudes," 1985; Siegel, 1992).

A. Should the following types of students be mainstreamed into the regular classroom? (Circle Answer)

	Never					Always	
Learning Handicapped	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Gifted and Talented	1	2	3	4	5	6	

B. How much experience have you had teaching the following types of students?

(Circle Answer)

	No experience			Much experience		
Learning Handicapped	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gifted and Talented	1	2	3	4	5	6

C. Which of the following type of students have you had success teaching in the past? (Circle Answer)

	No success			Much success		
Learning Handicapped	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gifted and Talented	1	2	3	4	5	6

Teacher Attitude Survey. Teachers' attitudes were assessed with four questions that addressed attitudes of acceptance, indifference, concern, and rejection toward each student in the sample (adapted from Silberman, 1969; Siegel, 1992); the ratings were on a 6 point Likert-type scale:

1. Attachment: If you could choose a child to stay in your classroom another year for the sheer joy of it, is it likely you would choose this child?

Not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

2. Indifference: If this child's parent or guardian dropped in unannounced for a conference, how much would you have to say about this child?

A lot to say 1 2 3 4 5 6 A little to say

3. Concern: If you could devote all your attention to a child who concerns you a great deal, is it likely you would choose this child?

Not likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 Very likely

4. Rejection: If your class size was reduced by a child, how relieved would you be if this child was transferred?

Not relieved

1 2 3 4 5 6

Very relieved

The questionnaire placed Silberman's qualitative study questions into a format that could be used for an empirical study. Although there are no reliability or validity analyses completed on these attitude questions, an attitude-behavior relationship (established by Silberman and others) can be interpreted as a measure of construct validity. Multiple measures of behaviors (from hours of classroom observations) were examined and compared with a teacher's attitude toward a specific student. The attitude questions developed by Silberman have correlated with certain teacher behaviors and teacher-student interaction patterns; these results were replicated in several studies (Evertson, Brophy, & Good, 1972; 1973; Jenkins, 1972). Silberman's data supports the validity of these attitudes by demonstrating their relationship with the teachers' behavior toward students.

Another advantage to using Silberman's questions is that they do not assume that people have only positive or negative attitudes. It is more likely that attitudes toward students may include feelings of concern or indifference which are not as dichotomous as the attitudes of attachment (positive) or rejection (negative). These other responses give additional information about teachers' attitudes toward students. Silberman and his followers have established useful attitude questions, but these probes have not yet been applied to the question of regular education teachers' attitudes toward integrated SD and GS.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to evaluate teacher's attitudes toward mainstreamed students with learning handicaps. Comparisons of attitudes toward GS, integrated gifted students and special education students, and SD and their peers were completed. The following hypotheses derived from a thorough literature review guided the design and analyses:

1. Regular education teachers will rate SD significantly higher for rejection than the NS and GS groups.

2. Regular education teachers will rate GS significantly higher for attachment than the SD and NS groups.

Hypotheses 1 is from the current literature on teacher attitudes, which has shown evidence that teachers harbor negative attitudes toward their integrated SD (Blazovic, 1972; Childs, 1979; Horne, 1983; Houck, 1992; Lobosco & Newman, 1992; McClosky & Quay, 1987; O'Reilly & Duquette, 1988; Parish, Eads, Reese, & Piscitello, 1977; Phillips, Allred, Brulle & Shank, 1990; Roberts & Pratt, 1987; Schumm & Vaughn, 1992; Vacc & Kirst, 1977). A few recent studies have found evidence that teacher attitudes may be more positive toward integration of SD which may indicate a growing concern toward SD (Harvey, 1992; Siegel, 1992; Thorkildsen & Lowry, 1991). A few studies demonstrated that teachers harbored mixed attitudes toward gifted students and gifted programs (Bransky, 1987; Larsson, 1990; Lobosco & Newman, 1992; Patchett & Gauthier, 1992; Patteridge, 1989; Phillips, et al., 1990) but the researchers predict that teachers' attitudes will be highly attached due to these students higher achievement and success in their classes.

3. Regular education teachers ratings for rejection of SD will correlate negatively with the following factors:

- teacher's general attitude toward mainstreaming SD
- teacher's prior experience with SD
- teacher's prior success with SD

4. Regular education teachers ratings for attachment of GS will correlate positively with the following factors:

- teacher's general attitude toward mainstreaming GS

-- teacher's prior experience with GS

-- teacher's prior success with GS

Measures of teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming has been the traditional way teachers' attitudes have been operationalized. One purpose of this research study was to compare these general attitudes to teachers attitudes toward their real integrated students.

The only factor that consistently related to positive teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming in the literature was experience and training in special education (Ammer, 1984; Brooks & Bransfield, 1971; Finn, 1980; Glass & Meckler, 1972; Hanrahan & Rapagna, 1987; Haring, 1956; Jordon & Proctor, 1969; Larrivee, 1981; Mandell & Strain, 1978; Panda & Bartel, 1972; Peters, 1972; Stephens & Braun, 1980; Williams, 1977; Yates, 1973).

One interesting variable that related significantly to teachers' positive attitudes toward mainstreaming was their prior success in working with exceptional children (Larrivee, 1982). Williams and Algozzine (1979) also discovered that teachers who said they would volunteer to work with handicapped students in the regular classroom had previously experienced success with handicapped students and/or had specialized support services that increased their confidence. These factors had not been examined in the research on teacher attitudes' toward gifted students.

5. Teachers' attitudes toward SD and GS in inclusion programs will be significantly different than teachers' attitudes toward SD and GS in pull-out programs.

Several studies have conflicting evidence of teachers preference for the pull-out special education services or full inclusion services (Lombardi, 1990; Marwell, 1990; Myers & Bounds, 1991; Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991; Walsh, 1991). It has not been studied whether teachers have more positive

attitudes toward students according to the type of delivery system. The teachers were asked by the researchers about what kind of special services were given to the GS and SD. The categories that evolved were full inclusion, pull-out, and no services.

Results

Teacher Attitudes

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, the results from the Teacher Attitude Survey were used. First, each teacher's attitude ratings of the students in his or her classroom sample were organized according to three groups SD, GS, and NS. Median scores for the four attitude ratings of attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection were compiled for each teacher's rankings of SD, GS, and NS. Medians of the individual teacher scores were then computed to derive overall medians for each of the four ratings for SD, GS, and NS. A Kruskal-Wallis test was run to determine if differences existed between the three groups for each of the attitude ratings.

For hypotheses 3 and 4, medians and interquartile ranges for teachers' attitudes are presented in Table 1; the Kruskal-Wallis tests are presented in Table 2. As the data in Table 2 illustrate, teachers were less attached to special

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

education students than gifted or non-identified students. They were also more rejecting toward special education students than the gifted and non-identified students. Finally, they showed the greatest levels of concern for their special education students, and the lowest levels of concern for their gifted students. These findings are illustrated by Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Teacher Factors

Three teachers' factors were examined to see if they were related to teachers' attitudes of rejection for SD versus their GS and NS students. The teachers' factors were:

- teachers' general attitude toward mainstreaming
- teachers' special education training
- teachers' prior success with SD.

Median scores were computed for each of the above factors. These medians and interquartile ranges are presented in Table 3. These median scores were then

Insert Table 3 about here

correlated with the teacher attitude scores presented in Table 1. The resulting Spearman correlation coefficients are presented in Table 4 for the SD students and Table 5 for the GS students. As can be noted in the tables, the teacher's

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here

attachment to the students was negatively correlated to general attitude toward special education, and teacher's indifference to students was negatively correlated to perceived past success with special education students. Both correlations, while statistically significant, are quite low (-.23, and -.21). The only significant correlation of the teacher factors and attitudes for the GS students was a negative correlation between teacher's indifference to students and the amount of past

experience the teacher had with GS students. For neither SD nor GS students were there any significant correlations between rejection and the teacher factors.

Hypothesis 5 was tested by computing Kruskal-Wallis tests to determine if there were differences between the teachers attitudes toward SD students in who received no services versus those in the inclusion and pullout conditions, and also for the GS students who received no services versus those in the inclusion and pullout conditions. The results are presented in Tables 6 and 7. As can be noted,

Insert Tables 6 and 7 about here

there were no significant differences for the GS students, and the only difference for the SD students was for the attitude of concern, where the teachers expressed greater concern for the inclusion students than the other two groups.

Discussion

Researchers who have indicated that teachers hold negative attitudes toward integrating SD often assumed these attitudes would lead to rejection of these students if inclusion or mainstreaming were to take place. In this study, although teachers held rejecting views toward the integrated SD in their classrooms, they also were highly concerned for these students. This concern is even greater for SD who are in full-time inclusion programs, rather than pulled-out for special education services. Additionally, teachers' attitudes toward SD student were not related to the teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming.

Teachers reported more rejecting attitudes toward their students who received special education services than toward their non handicapped students, as has been documented by previous research studies. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. However, teachers were also significantly concerned for their students with learning handicaps. None of the previous studies asked teachers about their

attitudes of concern for students with handicaps. The general questions devised by researchers forced teachers to choose pro or con regarding mainstreaming, and did not take into account other kinds of attitudes that teachers may have held (Siegel, 1992). The regular education teachers' apparent concern offers hope that they would not mind working with special needs students if they had the skills, competence, knowledge and support to do so successfully.

Teachers were significantly more attached to their gifted students than their special education students, which supported Hypothesis 2. This result seems to support some previous research studies (Lobosco & Newman, 1992; Phillips et al., 1990). It is understandable that teachers would enjoy teaching highly able students, but surprisingly there was no difference between gifted students and teachers' attitudes toward non-identified students. This result could be explained by a lack of a perceived difference between the GS and NS groups.

Contrary to studies which measured teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming or inclusion (Larrivee, 1982; Mandell & Strain, 1978; Mark, 1980; Williams, 1977), teachers' attitudes toward specific students were not related to the teachers' special education training, special education experience, or previous success with SD or GS. Hypothesis 3 was not supported by the data. Teacher's general attitudes toward mainstreaming, their experience and success with SD did not correlate to their attitudes of rejection toward SD.

The most striking implication was the finding of no relationship between teachers' general attitudes toward mainstreaming SD and their attitudes toward the integrated SD in their classrooms. This result gives reason to question some of the interpretations made by previous researchers who have explored teachers' attitudes toward students with handicaps. (Blazovic, 1972; Childs, 1979; DeLeo, 1976; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1989; Horne, 1983; Moore & Fine, 1978; Parish et al., 1977; Sigler & Lazar, 1976; Vacc & Kirst, 1977). Based on this

research, many teacher trainers have placed great emphasis on changing regular teachers' attitudes toward mainstreaming students with handicaps (Donaldson, 1980; Gallagher, 1985; Harper-Barach, Cronin, Corwin & Meder, 1990; Hudson, Reisberg & Wolf, 1983; Shechtman, 1989; Smelkin & Lieberman, 1984). Ryor (1977), ex-president of the National Education Association, stated that the intent of PL 94-142 would be destroyed if teachers did not have positive attitudes toward mainstreaming students with handicaps. The results from this study suggest that changing teachers' general attitudes may not necessarily change teachers' behaviors or their ability to cope with mainstreamed students.

Hypothesis 4 was also not supported by the data. The attachment attitudes of teachers with gifted students did not related to their general attitudes toward mainstreaming gifted students or their prior experience and success with these students. These results demonstrate again that teachers' general attitudes toward gifted students and programs do not necessarily relate to teachers' attitudes toward the actual gifted students in their classrooms.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that there would be a significant difference in teachers' attitudes toward their GS and SD students who were in inclusion programs versus those who were in pull-out programs. The hypothesis was not supported for gifted students. It appears there was no significant differences in teacher attitudes toward GS according to service delivery. But, the data did support one significant difference between teachers' attitudes toward SD in inclusion programs as compared to SD in pull-out programs.

Special education inclusion or pull-out (or no services) did show differences in teachers' attitude of concern. It is understandable that teachers are more concerned about students that are in their classes for the full day, than those who are removed for special education services. With school districts moving toward more implementation of inclusion services, this result may be interpreted

as encouraging or discouraging. Either regular education teachers are more concerned because they believe these student's needs are not being met or because they now feel more responsible about the student's learning.

The "no services" category in our results was a byproduct of our survey question. It appears that regular education teachers believe that there are identified special education students in their classes that are not receiving any services at all. For the purposes of analysis, this category was kept separate from inclusion students, who receive special education services in the regular classroom setting and pull-out students, who receive special education services in a separate resource room.

A reason these results may differ from previous studies could be due to students' characteristics other than learning handicaps, such as race, achievement, and gender. Asking teachers for their attitudes toward real students involves teachers' considerations of many other variables besides the students' label such as classroom behavior, personality, motivation and students' attitudes. This methodology was employed so that the multitude of variables that do affect teachers' attitudes would be included, as opposed to hypothetical vignettes and forced choice questions which only look at the effects of labels upon teachers' attitudes.

Despite the robustness of the findings, there are limitations to this study. One weakness was the problem of socially acceptable answers. It is more socially appropriate, or "politically correct" for teachers to express attachment and concern rather than rejection for students. This has also been a problem with previous research into teachers' attitudes. Also, the use of restricted 6 point scales may have influenced the correlation coefficients. However, it is reasonable to assume that most teachers were honest about their attitudes toward students since anonymity was assured.

The methodology employed for this study is an effective model for exploring teachers' attitudes toward students. Although asking teachers about real students is more time-consuming for a researcher than using vignettes or general questions, a more accurate assessment of teachers' attitudes is acquired. The results of this study are an important addition to our understanding about integrating gifted students and students with learning handicaps. If teachers' general attitudes toward inclusion do not determine their specific attitudes toward SD or GS, then it is unlikely they are the major contributors to integration's success or failure. Hopefully, teacher's increased concern toward special education inclusion students may give hope to improved instructional practices or modifications for these students.

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Table 1

Medians and Interquartile Ranges for Teachers' Attitudes Toward Gifted Students, Special Education Students, and Non-Identified Students

	GS	SD	NS
Attachment	M=5 Q1-Q3=2	M=3 Q1-Q3=2	M=5 Q1-Q3=1.5
Indifference	M=2 Q1-Q3=1.5	M=2 Q1-Q3=1.5	M=2 Q1-Q3=1
Concern	M=2 Q1-Q3=3	M=4.5 Q1-Q3=2.5	M=3.25 Q1-Q3=1.5
Rejection	M=1 Q1-Q3=1	M=5 Q1-Q3=2	M=2 Q1-Q3=1

Table 2

Kruskal -Wallis Summary Table

	GS	SD	NS	χ^2
Attachment	M=5	M=3//	M=5	16.44***
Indifference	M=2	M=2	M=2	5.89
Concern	M=2	M=4.5	M=3.25	19.02***
Rejection	M=1	M=5	M=2	19.41***

***p<.001

Table 3

Medians and Interquartile Ranges for Teacher Factors

	M	Q1-Q3
SD attitude	4	2
SD experience	4	2
SD success	4	2
GS attitude	6	3
GS experience	4	2
GS success	5	1

Table 4

Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Attitudes and Teacher Factors for SD

	SD attitude	SD experience	SD success
Attachment	-.23*	.03	-.10
Indifference	-.14	-.09	-.21*
Concern	-.07	.19	.16
Rejection	-.15	-.13	.14

n=94 *p<.05

Table 5

Spearman Correlation Coefficients for Attitudes and Teacher Factors for GS

	GS attitude	GS experience	GS success
Attachment	.04	.05	-.07
Indifference	-.03	-.28*	-.11
Concern	.24*	.02	.07
Rejection	-.07	-.01	.01

n=76 *p<.05

Table 6

Kruskal -Wallis Summary Table for SD

	No Services	Inclusion	Pullout	χ^2
Attachment	M=2.5	M=3	M=3	.81
Indifference	M=2	M=1.5	M=2	1.80
Concern	M=4	M=5.5	M=4	13.76***
Rejection	M=3	M=3.5	M=3	1.85

***p<.001

Table 7

Kruskal -Wallis Summary Table for GS

	No Services	Inclusion	Pullout	χ^2
Attachment	M=5	M=4	M=5	1.59
Indifference	M=2	M=2	M=2	1.78
Concern	M=2.5	M=1.5	M=3	2.91
Rejection	M=1.5	M=2	M=2	2.24

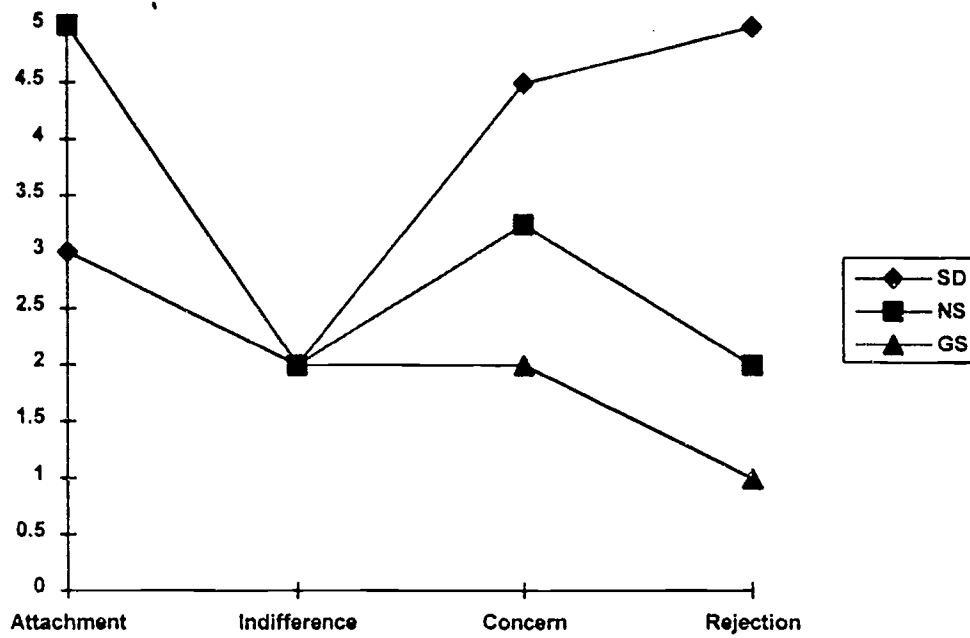


Figure 1. Teacher's attitude ratings for SD, NS, and GS students.